

Testimony of Lorrie Wesoly
Director of Community Relations, Leeway RCH
Re: H.B. No. 5037 (COMM) AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM
ENDING JUNE 30, 2023.

Concerning
Department of Social Services Budget- Residential Care Home Funding
Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services Public Hearing, February 23, 2022

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and Members of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services, **thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on the Department of Social Services Budget related to Residential Care Home Funding.**

My name is Lorrie Wesoly, Director of Community Relations at Leeway, Inc., Residential Care Housing located in New Haven. I am here today to raise concerns with the Governor's budget related to residential care homes and express the strong need for a rate increase for residential care homes throughout the state and an increase in wages for our employees.

DESCRIBE YOUR HOME, TYPE OF RESIDENTS AND CHALLENGES, NUMBER OF BEDS, WHAT YOU PROVIDE RESIDENTS. DESCRIBE THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC

Leeway's Residential Care Housing Program provides housing for 30 individuals with HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C and /or related conditions with 24-hour med-certified compassionate staff. Many of our residents also have multiple co-morbidities such as unique cancers, infections, diabetes, heart disease, depression, anxiety, and other psychiatric and neurological conditions which complicates the care they require.

Some residents are well enough to be discharged to the community. Leeway has the capacity to follow residents for up to 3 months through the HOPWA program to support their continued independence in the community. Discharged residents are provided with doctor appointments and where needed with home care services

The impact of the pandemic on the residents includes isolation due to the restriction of visitors and the elimination of group activities. Many residents had to delay and or cancel their plan of moving into the community. More than half of our residents are using drugs. To address some of these issues, Leeway started a Socialization Activities Program utilizing HOPWA's MSW & BSW interns to provide additional services and constructive activities to reduce drug use.

Here are two statements from our residents:

I love the staff. They listen to you and come right away when you need them. I am sober for 6 years now and attend my appointments. Angie is the best!

Leeway is a blessing to me and to others who have HIV/AIDS. I was able to get myself together and now I am ready to move into the community. The staff is great, and I feel respected. Angie goes above and beyond. Her heart is here, and she treats all the same.

Last year's biennium budget included a transfer of some residential care home spending to Medicaid. This shift was done to save the state money and provide residential care homes with much-needed resources. The plan is for residential care homes to become Medicaid billers starting April 1, 2022.

Despite our Association meeting with the Dept. of Social Services several times to discuss this there has been no operationalized plan for residential care homes to become Medicaid billers. **These funds are critically important to our homes and employees who have been counting on the increased revenue to deal with the impact of the pandemic. We would urge the Appropriations Committee to ensure these dollars go to increasing residential care home rates!**

We value our employees who deserve so much more for the work they do for a challenging but rewarding population. **[DESCRIBE IMPACT OF PANDEMIC ON STAFF AND SPECIFIC CHALLENGES- IF YOU HAVE LOST EMPLOYEES TO GROUP HOMES OR RETAIL OR IF YOU HAVE HAD TO CUT HEALTH BENEFITS DUE TO COSTS].**

Our employees work for the privilege of serving others. The RCH residents are treated as if they are their brothers and sisters. During this pandemic they have been asked to stretch their innate good will and stay beyond their shift and even take on extra shifts when needed. The increase in substance use has most certainly complicated the care required. Many of our staff suffer from burnout not only due to Covid at Leeway, but their own families as well.

While other providers received additional federal funding, Leeway and many other organizations did not. We thank our dedicated and courageous staff every day and don't want to see them leave. But we also understand that they deserve to be fairly compensated. Losing

them will not only impact Leeway's continuity of care but more importantly the residents themselves.

Unfortunately, paying employees the necessary wages to attract new people to our industry is almost impossible resulting in higher employee turnover. Our industry strives to employ people in long term careers so that they can establish and maintain relationships with our residents. This leads to better long-term health outcomes, stability in the home and savings to our state.

The inconsistent funding also challenges our business operations. We are constantly having to make repairs that are subject to state inspections and yet have virtually no margins to do so. **[IF YOU HAVE HAD TO PAY ON CREDIT CARD/TAKE OUT LOANS ETC. DESCRIBE THE FISCAL CHALLENGES; DISCUSS INCREASED EXPENDITURES DURING THE PANDEMIC]**

During the pandemic we had to rely on City funding from our HOPWA grant to provide us with additional interns who provided essential case management services for our RCH residents.

Unlike other providers during the pandemic, we did not see any federal funding to support our work or our employees. The Governor's proposal to enable residential care homes to bill Medicaid acknowledges the need for higher rates.

We provide a critical service for the state and care for some of the most vulnerable people. We do this for a low cost. My home and other residential care homes throughout the state have had to get by with rates failing to keep up with costs and yet we serve as the safety net for many people with mental health diagnoses and substance abuse issues. Unlike other providers, our residents are almost all state funded limiting our ability to cost shift and make up for low rates.

Please support residential care home funding so that we can keep our great employees and pay them fairer wages while they care for some of the most vulnerable in the state.

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